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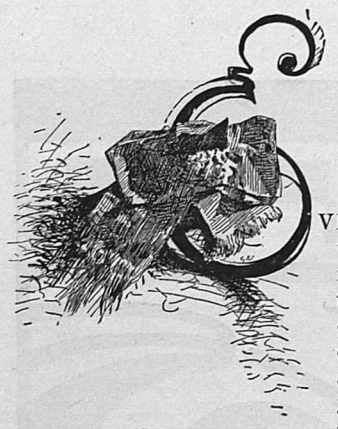
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CURTAINS AND CARPETS.

BY

G. H. BLAGROVE.

EVEN while the use of textile fabrics for furnishing and decorative purposes gives opportunities for the display of considerable artistic taste and judgment, yet we are sorry to add, it sometimes leads us to deplore the absence of those qualities. Happily things are not now so bad as they were forty years ago. We do not now so frequently come across those glaring floral patterns and heavy turned wood fringes which used to disfigure our curtains, nor those highly shaded pictorial designs which made us almost afraid to walk upon our carpets. Yet there is room for improvement, and it is generally admitted that some of the best English designs for textile fabrics are inferior to many of Oriental production.

Apart from the special purposes to which they may be applied, decorative fabrics should be regarded as belonging to two classes; those of which the entire surface is always exposed to view such as carpets and wall tapestries, and those which are intended to be hung in folds, so that the designs with which they are covered are only partially visible, as is the case with curtains.

It is obvious that in the latter class anything in the nature of pictorial patterns would be quite out of place. Representations of human faces, animal forms, or even natural foliage, lose much of their effect when placed upon an undulating surface like that of a curtain when fully drawn, but when half concealed in its gathered-up folds they appear so mutilated as to be entirely thrown away. Such is the case with some of the medallion heads, figures, floral wreaths and continuous scroll patterns so often introduced into the borders of modern curtains—designs that can be applied with good effect in flat wall decoration.

The particular sorts of patterns that seem most suitable for curtains are those consisting of mere repetitions of geometrical forms, so that the parts hidden in the folds may not differ from those which are visible. The divisions of the pattern must of course be sufficiently small to enable them to be seen without any uncomfortable sense of incompleteness, and sufficiently unobtrusive not to attract undue attention. They must also be of such forms that they may lose none of their beauty by being turned sideways. At the same time it is desirable to suggest by its pattern that a curtain is intended to be hung vertically, and for this reason elongated forms are to be preferred.

The colors of curtains should be governed by those in the surrounding decoration. Curtains are generally made darker than the wall tints, chiefly with the object of marking recesses. It must be remembered, however, that additional depth is obtained from the shadows in the folds, and the proportion of curtain to wall space should be taken into consideration on the general principle that the lightest colors should be applied to the largest surfaces. The height of a curtain recess should also influence the colors and patterns of curtains which should be modified according to their distance from the eye.

It would be quite allowable to give the lower part of a curtain a darker ground and heavier pattern than the upper part, especially when this is already suggested by the dado of the room, the horizontal lines of which can sometimes be continued through the pattern of a curtain. In windows the colors and patterns of curtains should be so selected as to harmonize not only with the room decorations, but with the colors in the external front.

Textile fabrics of so many different kinds are now employed for wall decoration, that there is room for wide choice amongst them, and every day some novel idea challenges criticism. When wall hangings are hung in folds and festoons after the manner of curtains, similar patterns are suitable. It is in those which are either stretched upon frames or otherwise extended in full view, that pictorial decoration can be employed with propriety. Here the representations should be more or less conventional, according to the nature of the fabric. There can be no such thing in any kind of tapestry as imperceptible gradations of color; all our tints must be flat and we should not, therefore, seek in any way to emulate the painter's art.

In a lecture delivered on "The True and the False," in the *Decorative Arts* some years ago, Mr. Owen Jones stated that carpets should be darker in tone and more broken in hue than any portion of a room, both because they present the largest mass of color and because they serve as a background to the furniture placed upon them. We certainly would advocate depth of tone in a carpet as tending to keep it down, just as lightness of color tends to keep a ceiling up.

The Oriental color decoration so much affected by Mr. Owen Jones, is, in its general effect, rather too heavy and sombre for a western climate where we are not troubled with a superfluity of sunshine. Yet we are inclined to think that the taste of the British public has too often been carried to the opposite extreme and especially in the matter of carpets.

There is a mellowness of tone observable in carpets of Oriental manufacture which seems to suggest that they are intended for use as well as for ornament, and which is rarely aimed at in any fabrics of home production. Nothing suits the ordinary English eye that does not look new, and we now have aniline dyes introduced into Persian, and bleached whites into Indian carpets to suit our notions of spick and span freshness of color.

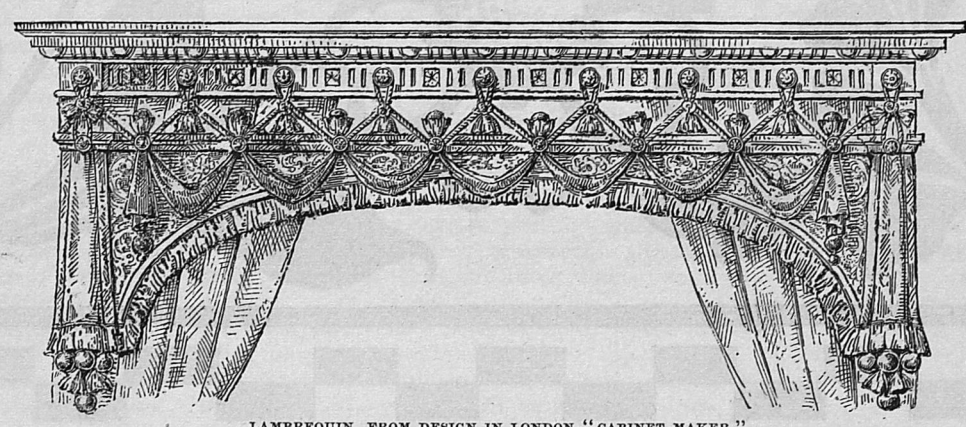
A principle to be borne in mind in all decorative coloring—that of repeating every tint—is constantly forced upon our attention in dealing with woven patterns, as in Kidderminster or Brussels carpets. Nothing can be more conducive to harmonious combinations than to be compelled to ring the changes upon a limited range of colors, and it is only where there is great liberty of choice, as in tapestry carpets, that the license is apt to be abused.

Perhaps it is a little strange that the impropriety of curvilinear forms in carpet patterns should not have been more widely recognized. The stepped contour which curves present, even in a Brussels carpet, might long ago have led to their abandonment. Turkey patterns, in which we find no representations of living forms beyond the rudest and most conventional leaf-like ornaments, and no attempt at producing curves might serve as models to illustrate the true principles of carpet designing.

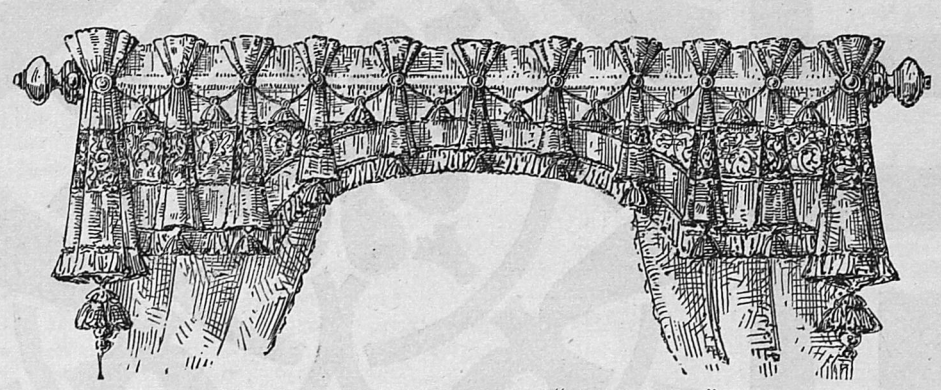
These carpets are usually designed with a border, and one huge pattern, the lines of which diverge from the center. An all-over pattern in small divisions is preferable for our modern apartments where portions of the floor are concealed by movable furniture, but the principles of design in the arrangement of Turkey patterns might be applied in a variety of ways. They are said to have been originally designed in imitation of inlaid jewel work, a fondness for which is characteristic of most eastern nations.

However this may be, the suggestion that inlaid patterns are suitable to carpets is worthy of attention, always remembering that we cannot divert the lines of a woven fabric in the same way that we can the tesseræ of a piece of mosaic work. The principle of making the pattern of the carpets correspond with the divisions in the ceilings was adopted by Mr. Owen Jones in his decorations to No. 16 Carlton House Terrace. Here there is no incongruity of effect, because the ceilings are divided up into small panels, but in many cases the ceiling panels are far too large to be repeated upon the floor.

There is, indeed, little to be said in favor of the practice, for the eye is not naturally led to draw comparisons between ceiling and floor decoration. The pattern of a carpet should be geometrical in form and the effect will be more satisfactory if the divisions in it are not elongated but so arranged that they can be looked at from any point of view with equal satisfaction and symmetry of effect. They may be larger than those in curtains, because they are upon a flat surface where they cannot suffer distortion, but they must not be too large to be fully grasped and appreciated by the eye. Rules of proportion in such matters ought to be readily arrived at, for whatever the size of the room the eye always remains at the same distance from the surface of the carpet.



LAMBREQUIN, FROM DESIGN IN LONDON "CABINET MAKER."



LAMBREQUIN, FROM DESIGN IN LONDON "CABINET MAKER."

NOVEL LAMBREQUIN.—In a large bow window of the sitting-room of a country mansion, looking out on a magnificent lawn, has hung throughout the summer a lambrequin of deep-green cloth, depending from an ebony cornice, with Greek fret gold indented, a band of crimson ornament on golden yellow ground running across its lower portion. The window reaches to the floor. There is a happy boldness in the conception of excluding on this scale both heat and light, though of the latter there remains abundance to set out the rich decorations of the room. The deep shadow thus created furnishes Rembrandt-like effects, and affords the eye a surface on which it may obtain reposeful rest. There is no sombreness, as some might suppose, in the arrangement; it is pleasingly artistic.

SUPERB TAPESTRY PORTIERE.

A MAGNIFICENT piece of tapestry work, just received from Lyons by a prominent firm on Union Square, so elaborate that thirty-two thousand cards were employed in its fabrication, presents a Hindoo scene in the sacred city of Benares. Two elephants in gorgeous trappings, under canopy of green and gold, one bearing the green flag of the prophet, pass under the shadow of a temple which shows brackets of gigantic carved elephants' heads, and above a line of carved figures of gods in arched recesses. Above is a lightsome arch from which the procession emerges, and beyond and to the left a huge structure capped with ornamental stone roof, and in the distance and fading into the cerulean blue of the sky, chequered here and there by luminous brown clouds, a pagoda rises, with a gigantic dome of spear-shaped leaf sections. The effect is subdued and restful. The high lights are in silver and the grouping very artistic. The border of the tableau is composed of a jungle marsh in which, below, a tiger and anaconda suddenly encounter one another; above, amidst the umbrageous, leafy foliage, both pose themselves for the attack, and higher still the tiger is seen pouncing on its prey. The rich colors and action contrast well with the subdued tones of the panel. In the lower and horizontal portion of the border two lions face each other in statuesque attitude.

DOORS may be made a valuable accessory to the color decoration of the room. The panels are given some plain, flat color. Then each member of the molding has some different tint—gold or any metallic color always being valuable. Deep red, blue, or black are good to throw out the other tints when placed in the recesses. The same scheme of color should be given the bare boards and repeated in the cornice.

WINDOW DRAPERY, DESIGNED BY R. GUASTAVINO.

